



NEWS RELEASE



**USDA Forest Service
Rocky Mountain Region**
Pike & San Isabel National Forests,
Cimarron & Comanche National Grasslands
Forest Supervisors Office
2840 Kachina Dr.
Pueblo, CO 81008

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/psicc/>

**USDI Bureau of Land Management
Royal Gorge Field Office**
3170 E. Main St.
Canon City, CO 81212

<http://www.co.blm.gov/ccdo/canon.htm>

Contacts: Ken Smith, Public Affairs Officer BLM (719-269-8553)
Barb Timock, Public Affairs Officer USFS (719-553-1415)
Ralph Bellah, Fire Prevention Officer USFS (719-553-1632)

RECREATIONISTS CAN HELP PREVENT WILDFIRES

PUEBLO, Colo, May 31, 2006...Due to low moisture so far this year, small fires can spread very quickly. Fire managers hope local residents and forest visitors alike will continue their support of fire prevention efforts. Residents and visitors should be aware of local fire restrictions on federal lands and be particularly careful with campfires and warming fires.

U.S. Forest Service Fire Prevention Officer Ralph Bellah is asking recreationists who plan to use the Pike and San Isabel National Forests and public lands managed by the BLM Royal Gorge Field Office to take extra precautions to prevent wildfires this summer.

Each year, hikers, mountain bikers, backpackers, campers, anglers, off-road vehicle riders, and other recreationists start wildfires that burn thousands of acres and cost millions of taxpayer dollars to suppress. These blazes hurt both the environment and the economy as they burn important wildlife habitat, prime recreation facilities, and valuable natural resources. The impacts of wildfires can last for decades and permanently change the way the southern Front Range is managed in the future.

Recreationists also have a financial incentive to prevent wildfires because anyone who is found responsible for a blaze that burns federal or state land is liable for the cost of suppression and damage to natural resources.

U.S. Forest Service and BLM fire prevention experts encourage recreationists to take these simple precautions:

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- * Check area fire conditions before you visit and strictly observe any restrictions that may be in effect. Call or visit the nearest agency office to find out if the fire danger is low, moderate, high, or extreme. Comply with any conditions on campfires, smoking, or equipment use.
- * Don't park cars, trucks, or recreational vehicles on dry vegetation. The exhaust system on a vehicle can reach a temperature of more than 1,000 degrees which is hot enough to start a wildfire under these conditions..
- * Use an approved spark arrester on all internal combustion powered equipment and vehicles. The screen, which fits between the exhaust port of the piston and the muffler, helps ensure that sparks generated by off-road vehicles, chainsaws and other equipment don't start wildfires. Check and replace spark arresters periodically to ensure proper functioning.
- * Use constructed campfire facilities in campgrounds. In dispersed areas, petroleum fueled stoves, lanterns, or heating devices are allowed.
- * Keep fire control tools handy. Make sure that you have a bucket of water and a shovel nearby in case your campfire starts to get out of control.
- * Make sure the campfire is "dead out" before leaving. Stir water and dirt into the coals with a shovel or stick until the coals are cool enough to touch with the back of your hand.
- * Extinguish smoking materials properly. Put out cigarettes, cigars, or pipes only in cleared areas free of vegetation or debris.
- * Fireworks are illegal on public lands managed by the national forests, grassland and BLM.

Careful Colorado

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